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The Big Business of Trash

Accusations fly as \$500M contract looms

By Sophie Braccini

As the Central Contra Costa Solid Waste Authority neared a deal worth \$500 million at the end of January, negotiating a franchise agreement with the companies that will manage all the trash for the next 10 years, allegations of malpractice were made against the front runner, Republic Services. The authority is launching an independent investigation into the claim, although CCCSWA director Paul Morsen confirmed that he does not think there is substance to the allegations.

A few days before the Jan. 30 CCCSWA board meeting, the group California Compost Coalition declared that 67 percent of Central Contra Costa's food and yard waste was not being recycled properly, citing "official state and local records" that showed Lamorinda's yard waste was being used as ground cover at local landfills instead. Using green waste as cover on landfill is legal, but it is not what Republic contracted for. Additionally, the coalition noted that using green waste mixed with food waste as ground cover is strictly prohibited by state law.

Morsen met with the California Compost Coalition on Feb. 5 to understand where the figures cited were coming from. After the meeting the director said that he does not believe that the claim is true, but given the seriousness of the case and to make sure there is absolutely no doubt left, he decided to entrust Intelliwaste, an independent consultant, with an investigation of Republic's practices.

"Intelliwaste's charge is to: one, determine if Republic Services is composting green waste, including green waste from CCCSWA communities that allow home food scraps to be mixed with this material, in accordance with the current

contractual obligations; two, determine if Republic Services has exceeded contractual limits on the use of green waste as alternative daily cover (ADC) at the Kellar Canyon Landfill and determine if there is evidence that Republic Services is using CCCSWA green waste mixed with food material as ADC; three, assess the adequacy of the CCCSWA's annual reporting against requirements established by CalRecycle as it relates to green waste composting and ADC use," stated Morsen.

Since 2007 Lamorinda CCCSWA's customers have been able to discard their food waste in their green bins with the understanding that Waste Management trucks take it to the compost facility operated by Republic Services on Newby Island in Milpitas, where it is turned into a byproduct for local farmers. The practice was extended to Walnut Creek in 2011.

At the Jan. 30 meeting, Tim Argenti, Republic Services general manager, stated that all the material collected to be composted at Newby Island is composted there, as per the contract and as attested by a third party yearly review. In a statement to the board, Argenti qualified the attack as "a desperate attempt by our competitors to derail the Request For Proposal process."

The two final contenders for trash collection and processing are Republic Services and Mt. Diablo-Recology. At the meeting, the CCCSWA's ad hoc committee and staff, and HF&H Consultants presented a recommendation to the board to choose Republic Services as the preferred provider for collection, transfer, organics processing and disposal services, and Pacific Rim Recycling as the preferred provider for recyclable processing. The report's recom-

mendation was based upon Republic's lower cost for the same diversion rate and lower transition risk, and concluded that Republic was the highest value option.

Tensions rose once again when allegations of Brown Act violations during the selection process were made by Wilson Wendt from the law firm Miller Starr Regalia, which represents Mt. Diablo-Recology LLC. He said that the ad hoc committee analyzing the proposals made decisions instead of recommendations.

CCCSWA's lawyer indicated that he did not believe there were any violations and he was corroborated by members of the ad hoc committee, however, he recommended postponing the decision to avoid a legal battle that would take even more time.

Many community members came to the meeting in support of Republic, praising Argenti and his team for exemplary service and community support, among them Anne Grodin of Lafayette and Edy Schwartz of Moraga. The staff report also listed dozens of communications by residents asking board members to support Republic Services and Pacific Rim Recycling.

The new 10-year franchise agreement being negotiated will offer new services that should lead the region to meet the state's target of a 75 percent diversion rate by 2020. Both Republic and Mt. Diablo-Recology plan to add new services such as recycling of batteries, rigid plastics and plastic bags. Republic also plans to add cell phone and compact fluorescent bulb weekly collection.

The Intelliwaste investigation report is scheduled to be finalized in time for the Feb. 27 CCCSWA board meeting.

1,000 Places to See

By Lou Fancher



Patricia Schultz Photo provided

If travel journalist Patricia Schultz was an airplane, she'd be a supersonic MiG-25 Foxbat fighter jet. Or maybe a slightly slower, all-weather F-15 Eagle. At an appearance at the Lafayette Library and Learning Center Jan. 29, she piloted a sold-out audience on a 45-minute, Mach 3, whirlwind spin around the world.

Ironically, the intrepid traveler and author of New York Times best-seller "1,000 Places to See Before You Die" dislikes flying. "Here's my secret: I'm a nervous flyer," she said. "I hate to fly." She never indulges in thoughts of airline preference: "whichever one is going wherever I need to be," is her selection method. Courageous to a fault, but no fool, she said safety is paramount, jet lag is "something to soldier through," and if tomorrow, she had to pick just one place to live for the rest of her life, it would be Italy.

Long before Schultz contributed to guides like *Frommer's* and periodicals including *The Wall Street Journal*, she was a girl, growing up with a German father and an Italian mother. Her heart, usurped by her mother's blood (her 2011 paperback second edition has Germany, 18 pages, Italy, 50 pages), Schultz said Italy is the most revisited country in the world. "Do you have to see it before you die?" she asked, not waiting for an answer, but supplying it herself: "Yes."

Originally published in 2003, "1,000 Places" profiles Schultz's curated selections of the world's best locations and sights. Beneath postage stamp-sized photos, she offers reasons why visiting is essential and includes tips on hotels, prices, websites, and more. Schultz has added 200 new entries and 28 new countries to the updated edition; performing a magic act by merging original entries and maintaining the total entries at 1,000. Without increasing the already brick-like book's size, she's added places that hadn't been "on her radar" (Ghana, South Korea) or were too tumultuous, immediately after breaking away from the Soviet Union (Estonia, Ukraine, Slovakia). Everything received updated tweaks, requiring a two page list of collaborators.

"Once you get out the door, adventure starts to happen," she promised, before delving into the splendors of 30 locations she'd chosen to highlight in the program. From London, a city about which she said, "everyone starts there at some time," her rapid fire PowerPoint traveled in just four minutes through Scotland, Wales, Ireland and Scandinavia. "Do you know that a person from this country that I spoke with referred to Scandinavia as a country?"

she asked, astounded. "It reminded me of the 30 percent of Americans who can't find Mexico on a map."

Scandinavia is a continent including three – and sometimes up to five countries and the Faroe Islands. When Schultz asked a young American boy how many countries Europe has, he guessed seven. There are 48 and she said Americans remain the most geographically ignorant people she's encountered.

Describing Norway's dramatic topography, waxing poetic about Iceland's Northern Lights and Berlin's proud, great museums (and a small village nearby, boasting nine breweries that hold Oktoberfest in August to catch the tourists), she suggested she'd been to heaven, one-thousand times over. Like her book, the talk was filled with tips about train travel, cruises, tour guides (worth the money), and how respect can earn trust and lead to special insights. "You get back what you put out," she said. "If you are a well-behaved American, you will find people are always nice."

Susan Terzuoli, Alamo, and Ingrid Lara, Danville, hadn't traveled far to hear Schultz, but their globe-roving wanderlust made them seasoned travelers. Terzuolio has visited every continent except Australia and marveled at how Schultz managed to get her "favorites" list down to just 1,000. Lara said today's digital age offers opportunities to "explore" on YouTube, but virtual visits lack sensory experience and are not substitute for actual travel. And coming home is made all the more sweet by having been away. "Each time I come back to the Bay Area, I appreciate it more," she said.

Schultz answered audience questions with clipped, often pithy responses. When she travels, she's expected to see more in three days than most people see in three months. She's been known to literally run through museums and suggested each person must find his or her preferred mode. "I enjoy seeing a little of everything," she said, perhaps inspired by the Asian proverb fronting her book: "Better to see something once than to hear about it a thousand times."

For more information about Schultz and her book, visit 1000places.com.

Don't Miss the Next Author Lecture at LLLC

The Lafayette Library and Learning Center will feature Dina Colman, author of "Four Quadrant Living: Making Healthy Living Your New Way of Life," at 7 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 20 as part of its Sweet Thursdays program. Colman will outline the principles of the four quadrants and discuss ways to reduce stress, live mindfully, eat well, exercise more, sleep better, engage in healthy relationships, and detoxify environments. For information, visit <http://www.lafayettelib.org/calendar/sweetThursdays.html>.

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